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Compiled Research & Materials, Appendix M: McPherson Town Interview

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Solar Co-op

<http://www.ohsun.org/front-page/about-solar-co-ops/start-a-co-op/>

We need 30-40 to get things rolling. The other solar co-ops that OH SUN has set up typically have around 100 houses involved, but the largest has approx. 200 in Cuyahoga County.

What is a solar co-op?

A solar co-op is a group of homeowners in a defined geographic area who use their combined bulk buying power to save on the total cost of going solar. Solar installers face significant costs finding solar customers. By forming a group of interested buyers, co-op members can receive a significant discount because the group has done some of the work for the installer. Co-op members also have the benefit of working with a group and with OH SUN to help educate and guide them through the installation process.

How does the co-op purchase work?

OH SUN helps groups of neighbors form co-ops to get discounts on members' individual purchase of solar systems for their homes. Once the group reaches a critical mass of members (roughly 30 good roofs), it puts out a request for proposals from area installers. Each bid contains a set price per the amount of solar the installer would install on co-op member homes. This allows installers to make individualized proposals to each co-op member. The co-op reviews all bids with the technical support of OH SUN. It then selects an installer to install systems on co-op member homes. Each participant owns or leases their own system and has their own contract with the installer.

What is the benefit of participating in a co-op to go solar?

Solar is a smart investment that lowers your energy bills and increases the value of your home. Going solar with a co-op will help you save money (typically up to 20%) on the initial investment. Most importantly, you will have the support of the co-op and OH SUN throughout the entire process.

Additional information from Luke Sulfridge, Program Director at OH SUN:

- Mr. Sulfridge says that they like to start by having an informational meeting/presentation to explain how things work and gauge interest.
 - Like to have 30-40 interested households at the first meeting.
 - Usually held at a community center/library/church and lasts 1 1/2 hours.
- To get the co-op started, they need what they refer to as a “critical mass”, which is 30-40 sufficient roofs to place panels on.
- To determine if a roof and it's positioning is right for solar panels, they do initial testing/assessments, which often simply can be done via satellite imagery, similar to what

they do on Google Project Sunroof - <https://www.google.com/get/sunroof#p=0>

- They look for a minimum of 2.7-3 kW and shoot for 200 sq. ft. of roof.
 - The panels need to go on a roof facing preferably south, but can also face west or east.
 - The new panels only lose approx. 10% of energy capacity if facing east or west.
- Recent studies show solar panels elevate property values. Typically, \$1 in = \$1 to value
- Typical number in their previous co-ops has reached 100 households, with a co-op in the Cleveland area being the largest at around 200.
 - This number is possible because they do these co-ops county wide, rather than neighborhood or city specific.
 - The more participants in the co-op, the lower the cost of the hardware (panels) and installation.
- People that are not actually purchasing solar panels are encouraged to get involved as much as possible too, but they are not likely able to be involved financially.
 - However, their involvement helps move the project forward.
- There are currently good federal tax credits (30%) associated with solar and additional credits through Heritage Ohio and rebates through DP&L.
 - <http://www.ohsun.org/federal-tax-credit/>
 - Mr. Sulfridge stated that they've found you can actually double dip on tax credits using historic tax credits through Heritage Ohio.
- A medium sized solar system costs approximately \$11,000, but that number is then reduced via tax credits, etc.
 - A medium sized system produces approx. 7 kW, which is sufficient for many homes.
- Ohio also currently offers what is called the Eco-Link program through the Treasurer's Office.
 - <http://www.tos.ohio.gov/ECOLINK>
 - This can lower your interest rate by 3% on solar.
 - Each individual signs a direct contract with the installer, so each person obtains their own financing from their chosen provider
 - Key Bank apparently has been most active with Eco-Link
 - There is a blog post about this on OH SUN's website (apparently their website is about to get a facelift, and they will provide further articles on a daily basis)
- With the solar panels, you can also install batteries if you choose, such as Tesla's Powerwall 2
 - actually can allow you to go "off the grid"
 - Majority of homeowners in their co-ops have not chosen to use batteries though

- Battery prices are dropping quickly apparently
 - Buying batteries upfront has tax advantages as well since you can use the federal tax credits.
- I talked to Mr. Sulfridge further about the larger buildings around our neighborhood, such as White Allen, ReStore, and the Hawthorne, which have large roof space, so he suggested that I reach out to each to gauge interest too.